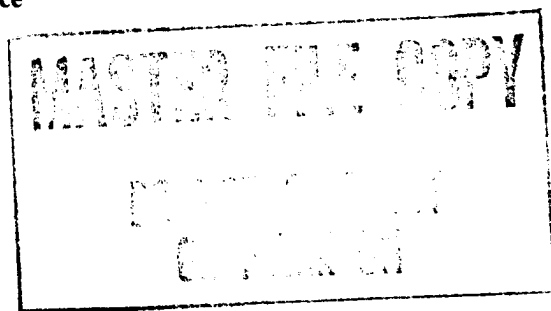




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## Kampuchea: The DK Resurfaces

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An Intelligence Assessment

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EA 84-10093C

April 1984

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# **Kampuchea: The DK Resurfaces**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by [ ] of the  
Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries  
are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,  
Southeast Asia Division, [ ]

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**Kampuchea:  
The DK Resurfaces**



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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 30 March 1984  
was used in this report.*

The Communist Democratic Kampuchea (DK) resistance has greatly boosted its capabilities and activity over the past year. Because of improvements in logistics and training and increased support from civilians in some areas of the interior, DK forces have been able to:

- Step up attacks on key Vietnamese logistic routes and sustain pressure on remote border positions.
- Move additional guerrillas into interior provinces where they have made commando raids in and near provincial capitals, district seats, and Vietnamese logistic facilities.
- Make tentative plans for arming a militia force in the interior.
- Establish new supply caches in the interior.



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We do not believe that the performance represents a fundamental shift in the balance of forces in Kampuchea, and we do not assume this progress will continue without interruption. Vietnamese forces remain vastly superior and could disrupt the DK's operations through concentrated attacks on DK logistic bases. Only with several years of sustained progress could the DK possibly turn the tide in its favor. Finally, the DK is vulnerable to political events over which it has little or no control: a cutoff of the vital China-Thailand supply line or a breakdown of the resistance coalition would critically weaken the DK's already long shot at regaining power.



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The DK's improved military performance nonetheless has lent impetus to ASEAN efforts to strengthen the non-Communist resistance as a counterweight to a possible DK return to power. If the DK continues to chalk up even minor battlefield victories, we expect ASEAN to increase pressure on Washington to provide aid to the non-Communists.



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We do not foresee a shift over the near term in ASEAN's opposition to Vietnamese control over Kampuchea. But if its efforts to shore up the non-Communists fall short and indicators of DK progress continue to mount, ASEAN will have to reconsider whether to continue support of the resistance forces.



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**Figure 1**  
**Democratic Kampuchean Military Activity, 1983–Early 1984**



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## Kampuchea: The DK Resurfaces

After several years of fighting, Kampuchean Communist forces under the leadership of Pol Pot ousted the US-backed Lon Nol government in April 1975. The new regime immediately began to purge anyone connected with previous regimes and to revolutionize Kampuchean society under a radical blueprint that would make the country almost entirely self-sufficient. As many as 2 million Kampucheans died during the regime's brutal three-year rule, either from the countless executions or from the rigorous labors the regime demanded. Internationally, Kampuchea maintained close links with only a few countries, chiefly China and North Korea, which supported agricultural programs. For the most part, however, Kampuchea was almost completely isolated.

Territorial disputes with Vietnam, and an almost fanatic determination by the new Kampuchean regime to avoid domination by an expansionist Vietnam, resulted in armed clashes immediately after the Communist victories in Kampuchea and South Vietnam in 1975. By mid-1977 units of the approximately 90,000-man Democratic Kampuchean (DK) Army were engaged in large-scale fighting along the Vietnamese border. At the end of 1977, Kampuchea broke diplomatic relations with Hanoi following a large Vietnamese incursion into Kampuchea. Heavy fighting continued throughout the following year, climaxed by an all-out Vietnamese invasion. In January 1979, Hanoi toppled the Pol Pot government and installed a puppet regime in Phnom Penh headed by Heng Samrin.

### 1979-82: The DK Rebuilds

Instead of destroying the remnants of the Kampuchean Army, the Vietnamese focused on building a new Kampuchean government and preparing for "elections." DK forces thus were able to regroup in mountainous enclaves along the Thai border where they began receiving food, medicine, and military supplies from China.

By early 1981, DK guerrillas were mounting harassing actions in the border areas as well as in central Kampuchea. Concentrating on preserving troop strength, however, the

DK made little effort to seize and hold territory and tried to avoid large, setpiece battles with the superior Vietnamese forces.

In early 1982, however, guerrilla forces did sustain a major setback, suffering several hundred casualties while fending off a 10-week Vietnamese drive against their principal stronghold near Phnom Melai. DK forces cut back their operations to recuperate, improve training and logistic capabilities, and lay the groundwork for expanded guerrilla operations in the interior.

At the same time, the DK was trying to soften the murderous reputation it had earned between 1975 and 1978. In late 1979, Pol Pot stepped aside as Premier in favor of the less notorious Khieu Samphan, although he maintained control of the armed forces and retained behind-the-scenes leadership of the DK. The DK also announced the abolition of its party apparatus in 1981,

In June 1982, following long and tortuous negotiations promoted by ASEAN, the DK joined with the non-Communist resistance groups headed by Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea.

### 1983-84: The DK Resurfaces

After almost a year of little activity on the battlefield, the DK,

in early 1983 began moving a substantial portion of its forces into the interior. In April, small guerrilla bands increased attacks on key road and rail links, while larger formations of up to 300 troops besieged isolated Vietnamese and People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) outposts along the western border. Journalists have documented wide-ranging forays by guerrilla forces in the vicinity of Kampuchea's Great Lake, the Tonle Sap, and refugees have reported increased DK visibility, freedom of

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In contrast to previous years, when guerrilla forces typically yielded the initiative to Vietnam's more mobile forces during the dry season (November-May), DK forces increased their activity in early 1984.

[redacted]

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movement, and military and political control in several portions of the interior since mid-1983. In some cases they have told of "liberated areas" complete with schools, roadbuilding, and public health works administered under DK auspices.

[redacted] forces close to the border increased pressure on exposed Vietnamese and PRK outposts.

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[redacted]

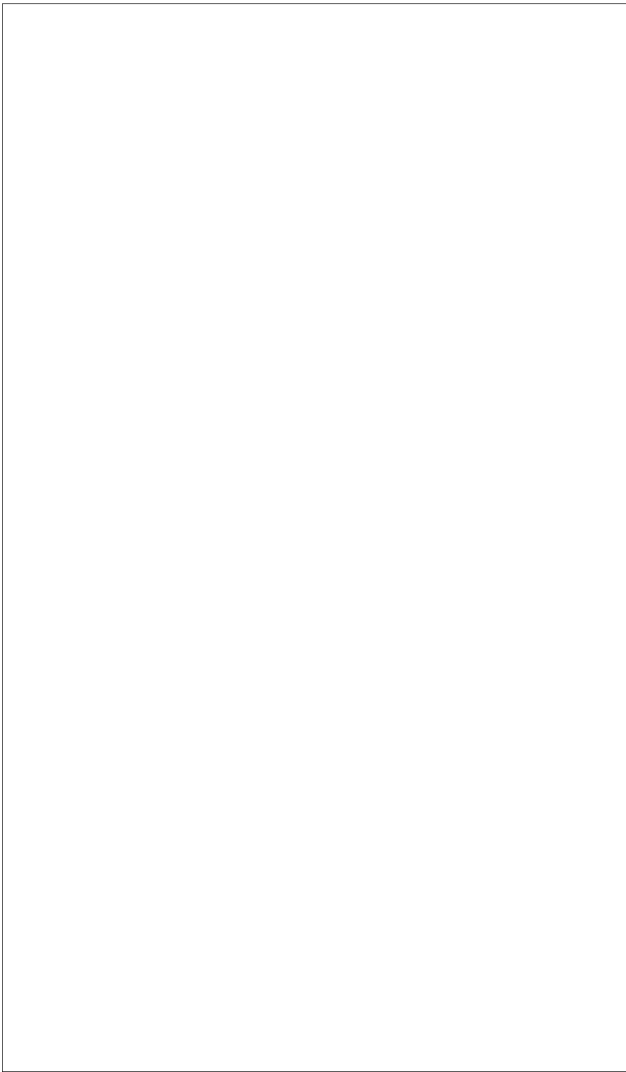
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[redacted] estimates have ranged as high as 60,000 troops, [redacted]

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**An Increase in Troop Strength?**

This marked improvement in military performance has prompted speculation, particularly within ASEAN, that the DK is rapidly increasing its armed strength. ASEAN countries estimate current DK armed strength at approximately 40,000, assuming a growth of several thousand over the past year or two. The DK and its Chinese supporters generally claim a military strength of 40,000, plus 20,000 logistic personnel—female porters who move the bulk of the DK's supplies to forces in the interior [redacted]

Our detailed examination of [redacted] the DK's 13 divisions does not substantiate any marked growth in armed strength in the past year. [redacted]

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[redacted] accurately counting armed troops is complicated by the

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secretiveness of the group, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] In any case, we think the DK's recent successes are attributable more to qualitative improvements in such areas as logistics and training and increased support from civilians in some areas of the interior than to significantly increased numbers of armed guerrillas. [REDACTED] Pol Pot remarked in late 1983 that increasing the DK's numbers was less important than fully preparing them for battle. [REDACTED]

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We estimate DK guerrillas to number between 30,000 and 35,000. The numbers cited [redacted] as the military strength of various units, however, often fail to distinguish among such categories as female porters and disabled troops confined to rear areas. Moreover, all DK bases are in malaria-infested areas, and defector reports indicate one-fourth or more of DK fighting men may be incapacitated by disease or other disabilities at any given time. As a result, DK troops capable of carrying out armed guerrilla missions may number between 20,000 and 30,000 men. [redacted]

Although we believe there has been no significant growth in the size of the guerrilla force, there has been an apparent "coming out" of DK supporters and cadres in the interior who had remained underground since the Vietnamese invasion. [redacted]

are killed each year. But the DK's ability to recruit larger numbers has generally been considered to be limited, and memories of Pol Pot's brutal reign have hampered DK efforts to cultivate active popular support. Numerous refugee reports indicate that many people cooperate with the DK more out of fear and intimidation than support for the group. Moreover, DK attempts to maintain support where it has widespread freedom of movement—particularly Siemreab-Otdar Meanchey, Preah Vihear, Kampong Thum, and parts of Kampong Cham and Kracheh Provinces—are limited by the lack of troops to protect people from Vietnamese reprisals. [redacted]

Nevertheless, the DK's association with Sihanouk since mid-1982 has helped it downplay past misdeeds, and we may see an improvement in the recruiting picture over the next year or so. Interviews with refugees by the US Embassy in Bangkok indicate that increased resentment of the Vietnamese presence also has helped soften popular antipathy toward the DK. Finally, liberal Chinese aid provides the DK significant advantages in material and monetary resources over its non-Communist rivals, and the DK's standing as the best equipped and most effective resistance group probably appeals to at least some segments of the population. [redacted]

#### **The United Front Strategy: A Means, Not an End**

Although the DK will continue to emphasize a united front effort by all Kampuchean factions to force the Vietnamese out, it clearly is seeking to regain sole power in Kampuchea. [redacted]

Ta Mok, a senior DK military commander and strategist, said in mid-1983 that, despite entering the coalition to strengthen international support for its cause, basic DK policy had not changed. If it did not win elections following a Vietnamese pullout, the DK would continue its struggle against the other factions. He also noted that secret construction of warehouses and stockpiling of supplies had already begun in anticipation of what could be a 10- to 15-year struggle with other Kampuchean factions following a Vietnamese pullout. [redacted]

Measuring the DK's ability to attract enough recruits to expand guerrilla forces or to build a militia is difficult. Battlefield performance and statistics on food consumption indicate that, at a minimum, the DK can replace the 1,000 to 2,000 men we estimate

[redacted] a secret DK directive provided for

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establishment of arms caches to be used to continue the struggle in the event the DK lost the elections. We believe the large volume of supplies provided by China are well in excess of near-term operational requirements, indicating that substantial amounts can in fact be set aside for the DK's long-term struggle. [REDACTED]

The DK's strategy envisages only a limited military role for the non-Communist resistance groups, although some steps toward military cooperation have occurred in recent months. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] DK and Sihanoukist forces conducted a small military operation north of Batdambang City in mid-January. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 200 of their troops participated in the DK's highly publicized attack on Siemreab on 27 January. [REDACTED]

The DK is also vulnerable to a cutoff by Thailand of its critical Chinese supply line. Although the present Thai Government shows no sign of backing out of this arrangement, a future government might take a harder look at some of the risks involved. [REDACTED]

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A breakdown of the resistance coalition would also hinder the DK's game plan for regaining power. Because it has little independent political stature, the DK must rely heavily on the coalition to maintain international pressure on Vietnam and to improve its popular appeal in Kampuchea. These benefits would be largely negated if Prince Sihanouk or Son Sann—both highly distrustful of DK motives—were to withdraw from the coalition. [REDACTED]

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#### **Battlefield Strategy: Strike at the Interior**

As long as the coalition holds and the supply link is maintained, we expect the DK to continue to emphasize expansion of guerrilla operations in the interior. In doing so, it hopes to force the Vietnamese to pull forces back from the border to protect their own rear command and control centers, thus taking pressure off DK forces moving supplies to the interior. Also, by mounting attacks against populated areas, the DK tries to force the Vietnamese to draw forces from rural areas, thus affording the guerrillas increased flexibility in the countryside. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] attacks against population centers had the added purpose of discrediting Vietnamese ability to maintain security. [REDACTED]

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The DK will focus on those areas it believes essential to moving guerrillas and supplies to the interior. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Kampong Thum Province, [REDACTED] is an important logistic base for guerrilla forces. [REDACTED]

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#### **Obstacles Ahead**

The DK faces imposing military and diplomatic obstacles. Vietnamese forces—at 150,000 to 170,000 troops—retain a large manpower advantage and control the strategic populated areas and transportation routes, a situation the DK's increased guerrilla attacks have not fundamentally altered. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Vietnamese are still able to mass their forces for attacks on specific resistance bases and other targets that are critical to the DK effort in the interior. The Vietnamese use of helicopter gunships and transport aircraft to strafe and bomb DK base areas in the interior beginning in March attests to the availability of resources the Vietnamese can tap to counter increased guerrilla activity. [REDACTED]

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[ ] In Batdambang and Siemreab—Otdar Meanchey Provinces, DK objectives include interdiction of vital transportation links used by the Vietnamese. The DK also covets fertile ricegrowing areas in these provinces. [ ]

[ ] the DK also hopes to begin shelling Phnom Penh by the end of the year, and claims to have pre-positioned 400 to 500 men near the city. [ ]

#### Implications of Growth in DK Strength

We expect DK fortunes to continue on a modest upswing for now. We will be looking for information on such factors as numerical growth in DK military strength, development of militia forces, any decline in Vietnamese morale and fighting capability, and increased popular support for the DK inside Kampuchea to help us determine how steep that upswing will be. [ ]

Thus far, ASEAN has welcomed the DK's resurgence—albeit with reservations—both as a sign of progress made by the resistance, and as a corresponding indication that Vietnam's military position is weakening. This in turn has increased hope in some ASEAN quarters that Vietnam might be more receptive to a genuine political compromise, although Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach's hardline statements during his visits to Indonesia and Australia in March appear to have at least temporarily dampened any such optimism. [ ]

At the same time, ASEAN will continue its efforts to make the non-Communist factions competitive with the DK. [ ] the three hardline ASEAN states—Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia—have been discussing ways to expand non-Communist forces to 30,000 men as well as to remedy perennial problems with leadership, factionalism, supply and ammunition shortages, and support of units

operating in the interior.<sup>1</sup> If the cost of such efforts increases substantially, [ ] ASEAN will look for more help from other countries. The United States, in particular, will probably come under greater pressure to provide material aid to the non-Communists. [ ]

Over the longer term, however, if the indicators of DK resurgence continue to mount and if equivalent gains in the strength and effectiveness of the non-Communist components are not forthcoming, contradictions in ASEAN policy will be highlighted:

- Continued strengthening of the DK may reduce rather than enhance the prospect of compromise with Hanoi, which views Chinese influence in Kampuchea through the DK as a threat to its national security.
- Continued arming of all three factions could trigger major civil strife rather than national reconciliation in the unlikely event Hanoi withdrew its forces without destroying or neutralizing the DK.
- The DK would probably prevail in an internal power struggle, thus inviting a Vietnamese return.

Developments pointing clearly toward these or similar outcomes would strengthen Indonesia's arguments that an accommodation largely on Vietnamese terms is the most realistic course for ASEAN. The Thai would also face the unattractive choice of continuing a policy favoring a DK return to power or adopting one resigned to acceptance of a Vietnamese-influenced Kampuchea. [ ]

ASEAN's dilemma would not end there, however. Any major departure by ASEAN from its policy toward Kampuchea would bring into play some fundamental differences in perspective on Kampuchea between ASEAN and China. For China, holding firm

<sup>1</sup> Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) has approximately 12,000 armed men. The Sihanoukist National Army (ANS) has about 4,500 troops. These totals will grow to 15,000 for the KPNLF and 6,500 for the ANS when arms pledged by China and Singapore in late 1983 are delivered. [ ]

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against Vietnam on Kampuchea is vital to preventing growth and consolidation of both Vietnamese and Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. Although these concerns are shared in varying degrees by ASEAN countries, the latter are also wary of the Chinese themselves, and remain suspicious that China, despite frequent assurances to the contrary, wants to restore the DK to power in Kampuchea. ASEAN, moreover, has little enthusiasm for China's view that long-term, sustained pressure on Vietnam may be necessary to break Hanoi's will. Such a policy assumes prolonged regional instability that promotes Chinese and Soviet influence at the expense of ASEAN interests.

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All this poses the possibility that the present Sino-ASEAN consensus on Kampuchea could dissolve. Moreover, given the close US alignment with ASEAN, one of the more positive aspects of Sino-US relations—a shared strategic outlook on Indochina—would be jeopardized.

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But it is still premature to assume that continued strengthening of the DK is inevitable. Indeed we believe the most likely outlook is for a cyclical fluctuation in DK fortunes with a modest net improvement over the medium term. Whether or not the DK continues to grow, however, it has clearly solidified its position as a force that must be accounted for in any eventual Kampuchean settlement.

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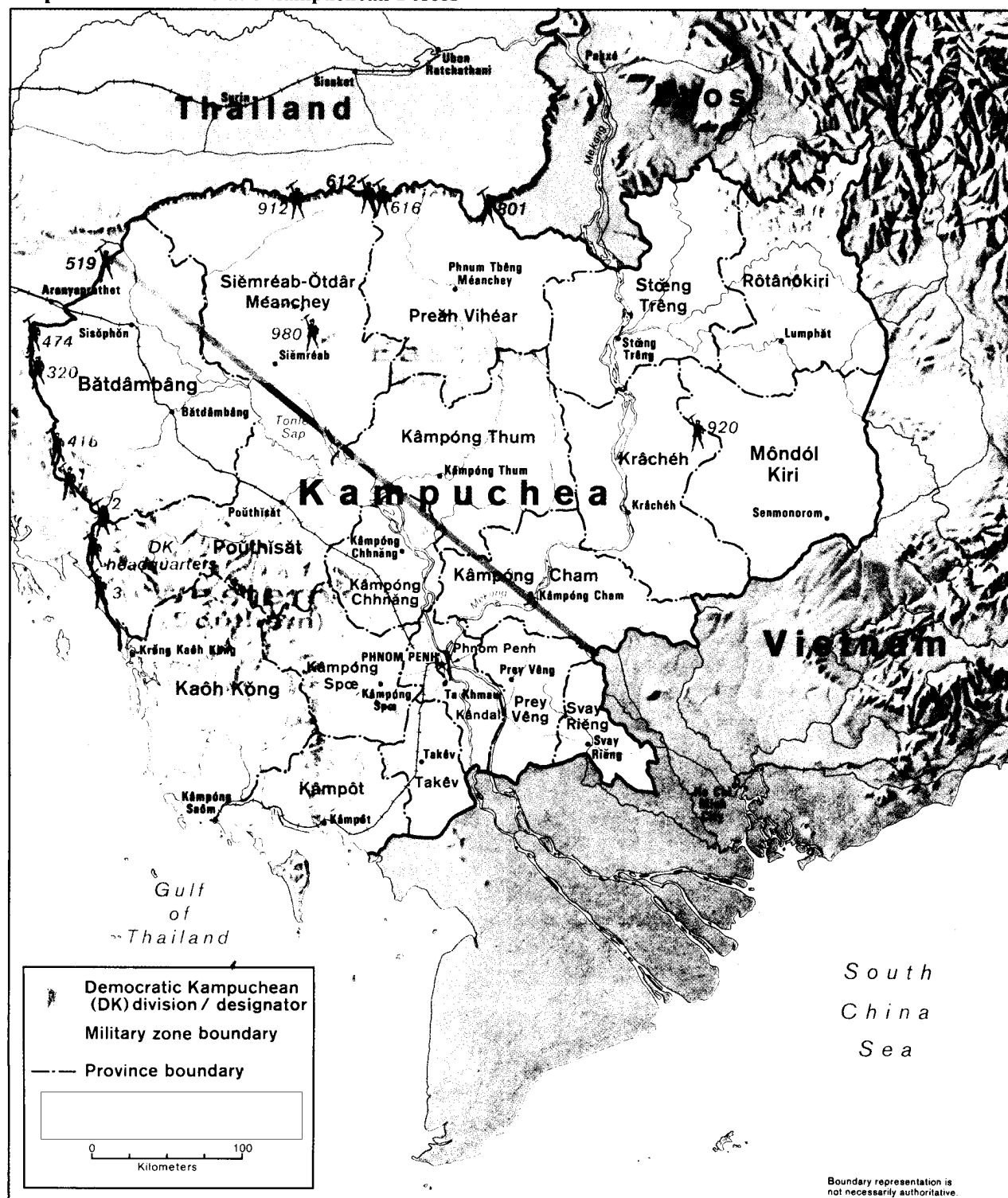
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Figure 2  
Disposition of Democratic Kampuchean Forces



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## Appendix B

### DK Military Organization, Morale, and Discipline

[redacted] the DK as of late 1981 had divided Kampuchea into two operational military zones divided by a line running from northwestern Batdambang Province southeast through the Tonle Sap to northeastern Prey Veng Province along the Vietnamese border (see figure 2). The Eastern Zone (also known as the Northern Zone) is headquartered in the Kampuchea-Thailand-Laos border area and commanded by Ta Mok. [redacted]

The Western Zone (or Southern Zone) is headed directly by Pol Pot and controls the seven divisions based along the western border. Defense Minister Son Sen previously operated out of the Eastern Zone but is now believed active along the western border. Nominally, most major military decisions are reached by consensus of the National Defense Council, a four- or five-man body headed by Pol Pot. The DK military command headquarters is in southwestern Kampuchea near the Thai town of Ban Tha Luan. [redacted]

DK divisions are much smaller than western or Vietnamese divisions, generally ranging in strength from 1,000 to 3,000 guerrillas. Divisions have three subordinate regiments, each of which typically has three battalions consisting of at least three subordinate companies. Despite its outwardly conventional organization, the DK operates in traditional guerrilla fashion. Most DK combat operations are mounted by small guerrilla teams ranging from six to 12 men. [redacted]

[redacted] The largest level at which DK forces have operated is in roughly "regimental" strength of up to 300 troops. This has become an increasingly common practice during the DK's resurgence that began following Vietnam's 1982-83 dry season campaign. [redacted]

#### Morale and Discipline

Although the DK has acquired a reputation for tough discipline over the years, it has been shaken periodically by internal dissension and desertions. In mid-1981, a regiment of the 912th Division broke away from the DK for a time following an upsurge in tensions deriving from longstanding regional rivalries among DK cadre. [redacted]

[redacted] The formation of the coalition government in June 1982 prompted several hundred DK troops to switch allegiance to Prince Sihanouk. As of late 1982, Sihanoukist officials had rejected a request for a mass defection by another 1,000 DK troops and civilians because the Sihanoukists could not feed them. The most dramatic case of DK discipline problems occurred when Vietnamese forces overran their base at Phnom Chat in late March 1983. According to the US Embassy in Bangkok, DK discipline broke down totally during the attack and troops ignored appeals by their commanders to regroup and counterattack the Vietnamese. Several hundred troops subsequently refused to rejoin their units. DK troops have also engaged in various illicit activities such as smuggling and extortion in local border areas, although the isolation of most of their bases has served to mitigate these problems. [redacted]

Despite such cases, the DK's battlefield effectiveness does not appear to have been greatly diminished. [redacted]

[redacted] Although defector reports often indicate low morale among DK troops, individual desertions are fairly infrequent. Fear of being caught by either Vietnamese forces or DK compatriots is a strong deterrent. [redacted]

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